Millers Creek, N. C.
Boxwood Lane
April 30, 1958

Judge Johnson J. Hayes
Wilkesboro, N. C.

Dear Judge Hayes:

You will find enclosed a history of the Millers Creek schools. I make no claim that it is complete, or that it does not contain much that is not in line with your plans for the school history of Wilkes County. I have, as far as possible, gone back to the beginning and traced the schools of the Millers Creek territory step by step. There is no question in my mind of the location of each schoolhouse. My grandfather James L. Bumgarner gave me the information about the first location. It is on the corner of his home place, and was my home with him for many years. It is still my property. There are several people living who can testify to the genuineness of the second, third and fourth sites, though the houses are all gone.

Now I figure that you will have no use for these empty sites of bygone days, unless it is to give samples of the Wilkes County schools in general, to illustrate the condition of the early schools in a general way. Of course it would be impractical to go over the county in such detail, or so I assume.

I would like for you to check over this manuscript, and indicate such parts as are not in line with your plans, and point out such additions or subtractions as you think should be made. Then I will be glad to rewrite it according to your suggestions. Or, if you prefer, just keep the manuscript and use whatever part you want in the makeup of your history. I think you will want final statistics of enrollment, graduation, etc., at as late a date as practical before your history is published. For this reason I have not secured the present statistics of those items.

Since Dr. Sam Holbrook already has a history of the Traphill schools, I suppose you will be able to get that information from him much more complete than I would be able to get it.

You probably have more history of the other schools in the county than I have, but if there is any other school, or any other phase of school life that I can help with, please let me know.

Respectfully,

M. F. Bumgarner

A Sketch of Millers Creek School History

The first schoolhouse in the Millers Creek community was located on a ridge near the double-pine corner of the Rev. James Linville Bumgarner home place, a few hundred yards from the present home (1958) of Luther Nichols. It is between two headstreams of Buck Branch. Only a pile of stones and tradition are the evidences bearing testimony to the above statement.

William Hinshaw, with his young bride, Charlotte Carroll, came from Orange County about the year 1827. He was a teacher, and probably the master of this first school. There seems to have been no chimney to this schoolhouse. Evidently the school sessions were in the warmer part of the year.

Another school site, apparently the second in this community, was on the west side of the Sawmill Road where the home of Vincent Faw now stands. This site was formerly marked by a pile of stones. William Hinshaw may have been the teacher in this school, but tradition is silent on this.

The third schoolhouse in this area stood east of the home of Alexander Gaither, and beyond the spring branch from his house. Mrs. Ann Wright Gaither was the teacher in this school in the years following the Civil War.

A fourth schoolhouse was built at the fork of the Sawmill and Bullis (or Oak Grove) roads, near the present Eller's Lumber Supply plant. This house, like its three predecessors, was built of logs. It had a chimney at the east end, a door on the south side, and a row of glass window lights at the west end facing the road. The log walls were hewed, chinked, and daubed with mud. The floor was of plain, unmatched boards, with plenty of ventilation between. The seats were split-log benches, with backs only where some of the benches were arranged along the wall. A long shelf

under the window served as a writing desk for any pupils who wished to take writing lessons.

Water was carried by the school children from a spring a few hundred yards away. All drank from a common dipper, unless some cared to furnish their own drinking cups. Woods surrounded the school on all sides, and there was no kind of sanitary system.

This log house was accidentally burned in the winter of 1894, and the school term was finished in a house belonging to Lee S. Brooks, and close to his home (now the home of C. C. Brooks, Sr.). He had built it for a dwelling house, but had not yet moved into it.

There was no school the next winter because the money due the district had to be used to pay for a new building. There was much snow that winter, and rabbit hunting was the order of the day for teacher and pupils.

The second building on this site was a framed, one-roomed house built of dressed and matched lumber. It had new home-made desks, and a cast-iron heater instead of a chimney with fireplace. This building was used until a new one was erected in 1912 on the grounds of the present Millers Creek school plant. The house was sold to John W. Miller, and moved by him to his home place, now the home of Will H. Adams.

Teachers at the school described in the preceding paragraphs were Janie Gilreath, Carrie Faw, Wiley Faw, Eller Fletcher, John W. Gaither, Linville Bumgarner, Isaac McNeill, Ada Sue McNeill, J. L. A. Bumgarner, James Eller, M. F. Bumgarner, Alice Higgins, Cora McNeill, Clora McNeill, Valeria Glass, Smith White, and perhaps others.

Little is known of the textbooks of these earliest schools. Webster's Blue-Back Spelling Book appears to have arrived on the scene first, and for a time was probably the only book used. It

was copyrighted first in 1857, but may have been in use before that time. In the school at this fourth location, a few other books were gradually introduced. Parents or pupils had to furnish their own books, and there was little money in most families for that or any other purpose, and little time for the teacher to give for extra classes. Among these newer textbooks were the Harrington Speller, Sanford's Arithmetics, Holmes's Readers, Maury's Geographies, Harvey's Grammar, Moore's North Carolina History, and Hansell's United States History. The teachers usually made copies for the children to write by, and some of the textbooks contained printed script models. Some pupils took pride in learning to write legible and even beautiful hands.

In the first schools the pupils recited as individuals. The first to arrive was the first to recite, then the others as they came in. In the later schools, there were classes in spelling, smaller classes in reading, history, and a few other subjects. Most students of arithmetic went at their own pace, and received help from the teacher when they asked for it and the teacher had time to give it. Sometimes those most advanced in arithmetic would solve problems for those less advanced.

Friday afternoon was often given over to spelling matches and reciting memorized speeches. All who could spell were usually required to join in the spelling matches, but saying speeches was more often on a voluntary basis. Often a pupil would recite some funny piece from Blum's Almanac, a patent medicine almanac, a newspaper, or speech book.

One type of spelling bee was called "cross benches." Two captains would have their spellers seated along the two sides of the room. The two spellers standing ~~to spell~~ up to spell orally would cross over to the side opposite their own line,

next to the line of their opponents. Then if anyone seated spelled a word that was pronounced by the teacher, it would profit his opponent rather than his colleague. That was a device to put every speller on his own resources.

Games played at school in these earlier years were bull pen, goosy, goosy gander, dare base, draw base, town ball, and fox racing. The country around the school was mostly in woods, and fox racing would often extend to considerable distances from the schoolhouse. The girls would often collect moss from the woods and arrange attractive playhouses in the woods near the school grounds.

In tracing the history of the Millers Creek schools, it is here necessary to go back to the year 1902. Up to that time the school district extended from Maiden Cane Creek and Reddies River on the east to the waters of Fishdam Creek on the west, thus including a wide area around Millers Creek Post Office. Pupils from the east side included the children of Barker Bullis, John Kilby, Bill and Andy Bumgarner, on Reddies River; and those of J. Tom Broyhill, Mary Wright, Octavia Absher, John Crowson, Fillmore Wyatt, and others still further out on the west side. Some children had to walk six miles a day in going to and from school.

At this date, 1902, County Superintendent C. C. Wright came to Millers Creek, looked over the situation, and set up two more schools in this territory. One was at Oak Grove on the east, the other on Brown's Road where the Rhinehart dwelling now stands, near Millers Creek. This virtually made three districts and schools where there was but one before. It can be seen that the school system was still committed to the one-teacher type of school.

This arrangement lasted until the year 1913, when the two schools nearest Millers Creek were consolidated and a new building

erected on the grounds of the present Millers Creek school plant. One acre of woods land was bought from J. W. Nichols, and a two-room building erected with a Masonic hall upstairs. It could be called a three-room building, since the upstairs hall was later used for school classes. These two districts were promised an eight-month term (twice the regular term in the State at that time) if they would consolidate, but so much of the school money due the districts had to be spent for the building that the school had only a three-month term each of the first two years after the consolidation. There were two teachers the first year, but the ##### ##### second year a third teacher occupied the Masonic hall upstairs.

A playground was cleared around the building by the principal and larger boys during their playtime. They brought mattocks and chains from home, hitched the chains up in the trees, dug around the roots, and pulled the trees down with the chains.

About this time the first patent desks were ordered from the Southern Desk Company at Hickory. These supplemented the wooden desks brought from the schools that were discontinued.

Soon after this consolidation, the people of the Oak Grove school asked for consolidation with the Millers Creek district. This was granted, and thus began public transportation to school at Millers Creek. However, the pupils were carried in a covered wagon. This was possible on account of the short distance, and necessary because the road was not good enough to allow motor transportation.

During the following years, the growth of the Millers Creek School was mainly in the high school department. At first there were but a few local students taking up high school subjects. Later a plan was worked out requiring the high school students to pay tuition and transportation on ~~on~~ a private school bus. This plan was so successful that a three-room high school building was erected, with a basement laboratory room. Principals during this period were M. F. Bumgarner, Evan Colvard, G. C. Scaife, Mrs. W. S. Wellborn, Sam Horton, J.L. A. Bumgarner, T. G. Perry, and E. R. Settle. This brings us up to the year 1929.

At this time the district voted local tax, the bus and transportation charges were discontinued, and the State gave the school an accredited rating as a State high school. The first graduation class received their diplomas in May, 1930---the class numbering 12 graduates. Up to this time the eleventh grade was transported to Wilkesboro for its fourth year and graduation.

In these years a high school science laboratory was built up and placed in the basement room of the first high school building. This laboratory contained a high-powered microscope, a barometer, and a fair supply of instruments and materials for use in general science, biology, and related subjects. The students caught a number of snakes and other small animals and preserved them in alcohol, made collections of various kinds of wood, butterflies, and flowers.

A beginning was also made in forest conservation. Northern red pines, loblolly pines, and long leaf pines were ordered from the Department of Conservation, and set on the lands of M. F. Bumgarner, east of the school, as a demonstration plot in forestry. One hundred seedling walnuts from the Department of Conservation were distributed to the students who would take them and set them

out at their homes. The pines may still be seen in the demonstration plot near the home of C. C. Brooks, Jr. In his yard is a grove of loblolly seedlings from the pines originally set out.

The Millers Creek School continued to grow until, in 1936-7, the first brick building was erected. This had 15 rooms, a lounge, and an office. The enrollment had now reached a total of 699--- 483 elementary and 216 high school students, with 31 high school graduates. Further growth and consolidation required a new wing to this building in 1951. Other buildings in use at this time were the old high school building and the agriculture building, both of wood, and the gymnasium built in 1938---a brick structure. This last is the Wilhelmina Triplett Memorial, named in honor of one of the teachers, daughter of Dr. W. R. Triplett. She was accidently killed in an automobile wreck, and her father made a major donation to this memorial structure in her honor.

In these years of rapid expansion, district principals were, in order, E. R. Day, P. W. Greer, John V. Idol.

Fuller mention should be made here, perhaps, of the old high school building and the agricultural building. The former was used as a lunch room and department of domestic arts, and the latter for the teaching of agriculture and wood work. Here James Graham taught high school boys and war veterans many of the practical things needed in a farming community. This building erected in 1951 had 4 rooms, and was fairly well equipped with machinery and tools. These classes were always ready to dehorn cattle, plant trees, improve mail boxes, and do such like practical things throughout the Millers Creek community.

In the year 1956 the high school departments of Millers Creek and Mount Pleasant were consolidated to form the West High School.

The two schools did not combine their classes this year because the building could not be completed in time for this. Millers Creek had 81 high school graduates and Mount Pleasant 29, a total of 110. A new and modern block and brick structure was built on a 25-acre tract of land 1½ miles west of Millers Creek. This school plant ~~is equipped with~~ has 15 rooms and 4 laboratories, and in May, 1957, graduated 95 students. These students are trained not only in literary course to fit them for college and professional work, but for lives of usefulness in the home, on the farm, and in the church and community. It is believed that with its corps of 20 instructors, modern rooms and equipment, gymnatorium, lighted athletic field, cafeteria, and growing library, high school students have here as good an opportunity as will be found anywhere in Northwestern North Carolina. In the spring of 1958 it continues under the leadership of John V. Idol as district principal, a leader not only in education but in the moral and religious life of the community.